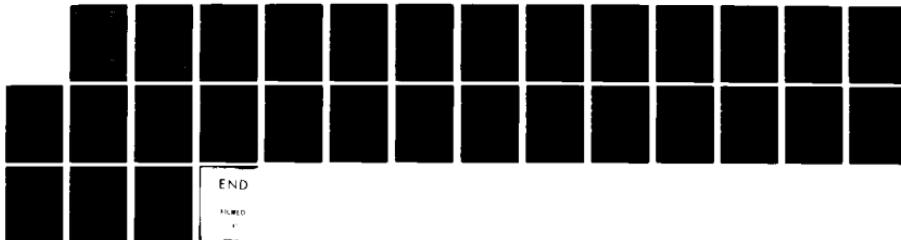


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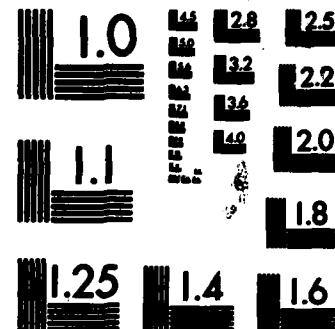


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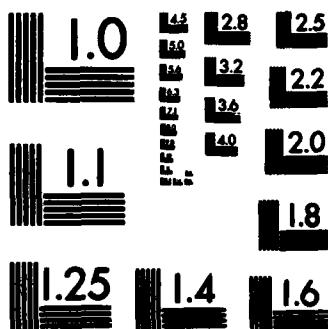
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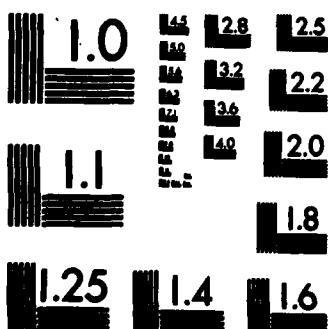
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THE POTENTIAL FOR CONFLICT BETWEEN SOVIET AND CUBAN POLICIES
IN THE THIRD WORLD

Rose E. Gottemoeller

August 1981

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PREFACE

Because this paper was prepared in the spring of 1979, its text contains no mention of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. However, the author feels that her conclusions concerning Soviet and Cuban cooperation in the Third World are not substantially altered by the Afghan events.

PmJ.S.

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Introduction

In recent years, the Soviet Union and Cuba have stirred up considerable controversy by their participation in the confusing national liberation struggles of the Third World. Analysts in the West have puzzled over the exact nature of the relationship between the two countries, for in places like Angola and Ethiopia, it has appeared that Cuba is providing the muscle and firepower, while the USSR is providing the money and brainpower. One of the commonest explanations is that the Cubans are playing a simple surrogate role in the Third World, repaying their large economic debt to the Soviet Union by taking orders from that superpower in its bid for influence among the developing countries.¹ However, others have argued quite convincingly that Cuba is not performing as a Soviet proxy, in Africa or elsewhere. For example, Jorge Dominguez notes that, despite increased Soviet influence, Cuba has maintained the general shape of its own foreign policy in the 1970s. The evolution of this policy has been made possible by a number of factors, including an improved economic situation and the professionalization of the armed forces. In character, Cuban foreign policy shows a direct link to the early days of revolutionary rule in Cuba.² Although Cuba has come to depend on policy coordination with the USSR, differences between the two remain, and stem from distinct ways of conducting business both at home and in the international arena.

This paper will examine these differences in order to illuminate possible areas where Cuba and the Soviet Union could come into conflict over policy in the Third World. Such conflict could cause, if not the

extreme of an open split between them, then at least some constraint upon their cooperation in the developing areas. Indeed, it would not be the first time Moscow has had difficulties with one of the "fraternal" socialist countries. During August 1978, three of its most unruly past and present allies met in Eastern Europe for the first time. Hua Kuo-feng of China, Tito of Yugoslavia, and Ceausescu of Romania succeeded in causing the Soviets considerable nervousness, not only by enjoying each other's company, but also by agreeing to "expand and diversify cooperation."³

Since their Revolution in 1959, the Cubans have also proved at times to be uncooperative allies to the USSR. Specific elements of Cuban foreign policy, domestic economic behavior, and ideological development have generated tension in the Soviet-Cuban relationship in the past, and may prove to do so once again. From the Cuban viewpoint, the Soviets have not been blameless allies either. At times appearing untrustworthy or ideologically "backward" to the Castro government, the Soviets have caused a number of fluctuations in the level of cooperation between the two governments. In short, neither country has found in the other a perfectly reliable ally, which makes analysis of their present conduct in Africa a complicated task for Western research. As Alvin Rubinstein puts it, "When the policies of two nations coincide, it is difficult to ascertain whether their motives also coincide."⁴

This paper will first discuss the evolution of the current relationship between the USSR and Castro's Cuba, highlighting areas where different approaches to a problem have resulted in policy conflict or independent action. Next, the paper will cover possible areas where

conflict could develop out of present Soviet-Cuban cooperation in the Third World. These speculations will reflect past differences in behavior, as discussed in the first section. Finally, the paper will conclude with some ideas concerning the essential nature of the Soviet-Cuban allied relationship, including consideration of the influence to be gained by smaller nations in their dealings with the great powers.

I. The Evolution of Soviet-Cuban Cooperation

Castro showed no hint of his future orientation toward the socialist bloc at the time of the Cuban Revolution in 1959. A Yugoslav delegation touring Latin America to encourage trade cooperation was treated politely but distantly, and a member of the delegation noted the continued leanings of the revolutionary government toward the United States. In fact, he was amazed at the American ineptness in handling Cuba: "Nowhere did I encounter anti-Americanism, though there was understandable criticism of American policies and business practices."⁵

By 1961, however, Cuba had signed its first bilateral trade agreement with the USSR, received its first shipment of Soviet crude oil, nationalized the oil refineries, industries, and banks, and broken diplomatic and consular relations with the United States.⁶ The effect of all this activity was not only to change Cuba's trading patterns and economic affiliations, but also to force the young revolutionaries to think more seriously about ideology. When he came to power, Castro was not a Marxist, but a nationalist and egalitarian idealist who wanted to abolish money and make all services free. He expected extreme civic virtue from his fellow citizens, with the idea that through heroic sincerity, effort, and will, all Cuba's problems would be solved.⁷ Perceiving a grave threat from the United States in 1960, Castro turned to the Soviet Union for survival, not out of ideological affinity or conviction.⁸

Ultimately, the Cubans went somewhat overboard from the Soviet point of view in acquiring Marxist ideology. The Soviets were well aware of the costs that could be involved when an underdeveloped

country declared itself socialist. For that reason, they waited for over a year to acknowledge Castro's enthusiastic 1961 declaration that Cuba was a Marxist-Leninist state. Even after that time, the Soviets continued to be reluctant to grant Cuba the title "socialist": "Even after Cuba had read itself into the socialist camp, the Soviets persisted in describing its major importance as being the advancement of the noncapitalist, rather than socialist, path in Latin America."⁹

The Soviets were concerned at this enthusiasm because they understood the ideological implications of the Cuban declaration. By the rules of communist construction, once a country has advanced to the stage of being socialist, it cannot retrace its steps through any of the preliminary stages of development such as feudalism or capitalism. If a declared socialist state collapses, then the validity of Marxist-Leninist ideology itself is challenged. For that reason, Castro's declaration forced Moscow to up its aid commitment simply to keep the Cuban economy above water and forestall any backsliding.¹⁰

Although Cuba was willy-nilly in the socialist camp by 1962, a disappointment at the hands of its newfound mentor forced another twist in its ideological development. In 1962, the Soviets installed offensive nuclear weapons on Cuba, and quickly withdrew them again under threat of nuclear attack from the United States. The strain of this missile crisis had a profound effect upon Castro who, unlike the Soviets, thought of the missiles primarily in terms of Cuban defense. The Russians, neglecting his concerns, had withdrawn the weapons without even consulting him.¹¹ It was a bitter lesson for Castro on the nature of great power rivalries, and led him to look elsewhere for

political support: "Castro, dependent on the Soviet Union for economic and military assistance, but resentful over Khrushchev's settlement with Kennedy, vented his ire by adopting a Maoist line on the feasibility of exporting revolution by violent means. This set him in direct opposition to . . . Khrushchev, who advocated a policy of peaceful coexistence."¹²

Throughout the mid-1960s, Cuba busied itself actively supporting revolutionary movements in Latin America and Africa, thus exploiting the growing rift between China and the USSR. Cuba's revolutionary fervor culminated at the First Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America ("TriContinent Congress"), held in Havana in January 1966. Although the Soviets intended to use the conference as a political forum to grapple with the Chinese,¹³ Castro immediately dominated the floor with wild rhetoric calling for guerrilla warfare throughout the Third World:

The peoples have the right to sweep away, and sooner or later they will sweep away, all those governments, traitors at the service of foreign interests in their own countries, and they will sweep them away through the most violent revolutionary action, because imperialist exploitation and oppression is imposed on them with an ever increasing use of force, violence, arms, and there remains no other choice open to them.¹⁴

The Soviets, who had ceased to support armed uprisings in 1935, found such inflammatory statements difficult to take. However, since Castro's guerrilla war had been an undisputed success, and since the Chinese held a position farther to the left from which to jeer, the Soviets felt obliged to uphold at least some aspects of "revolutionary

action." Castro, however, was not satisfied, and accused the orthodox leadership of being a "Mafia of pseudo-revolutionaries."¹⁵

This complicated tangle of ideological conflict continued until 1968, at which time Ché Guevara's death in Bolivia signaled the failure of Cuban efforts to export revolution to Latin America. The Cuban economy also began to collapse under pressure from the USSR, and elsewhere.¹⁶ In addition, Cuba's former cordial relations with China began to deteriorate, thus depriving Castro of outside support in his clashes with the Soviet Union.¹⁷

Castro's role as a maverick is generally considered ended with his endorsement of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968.¹⁸ Cuba entered into a period of strong alliance with the USSR, and fitted its ideology more closely to the Soviet model. However, according to Wayne Smith, "below the surface, the seeds of rivalry and discord between the Cubans and their Soviet mentors remain."¹⁹

It should be noted that the personality and ideals of Fidel Castro play an important part in the formulation of Cuban ideology. States one commentary, "Fidel Castro has never been content at playing a small role in history."²⁰ Castro has been called a Third-World moralist whose continued devotion to revolution stems directly from his own success in 1959.²¹ He really believes in an "internationalist mission" for Cuba, and thus has considerable personal impact on Cuban foreign policy.²² He also is a pragmatist who has twice since the Cuban Revolution turned to outside sources for support, once after perceived threats from the United States, the second time after disappointment by the Soviet Union. Castro's ideology, in short, seems tailored to work

well for Cuba. It mixes pragmatism, vision, and a worldwide perspective in a way that is quite out of proportion with the size of that small Caribbean island nation.²³

It has been said of Castro that his heart is in Peking but his stomach in Moscow.²⁴ After the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, Castro did more than turn to Peking for ideology; he also decided that Cuba should have more economic self-sufficiency. The Soviet bloc countries had purchased most of Cuba's two main exports, sugar and nickel, since 1961.²⁵ In order to diversify trading partners and thus lessen its dependence on the intrabloc trade, Cuba needed a way to expand its production in order to have a large enough surplus to sell above amounts already contracted for. The result was Castro's version of the Great Leap Forward, an ambitious plan to expand production of sugar to 10 million metric tons in 1970, almost double the amount produced in 1965.²⁶ Workers were called upon to exert heroic efforts, other sectors of the economy were neglected, Fidel Castro threw his personal prestige behind the scheme, and the result was a dismal failure. The economic idealists in Havana had forgotten to take into account factors beyond their control, like bad weather and poor prices: "The combination of the two variables worked against the Cubans; whenever they had a good crop, prices were low and, conversely, when prices were high, they had a poor crop."²⁷

After 1970, Cuba reorganized its severely damaged economy along the lines of the Soviet central planning model, thus allowing the USSR to take a larger place in Cuban economic decisionmaking.²⁸ Cuba's Great Leap Forward was over, and recovery could begin.

Politics also entered more directly into Soviet-Cuban economic relations in the 1960s. During the ideological scufflings of 1967-68, when Castro was calling the Russians "pseudo-revolutionaries" and arresting pro-Moscow members of the Cuban Central Committee, the Soviet Union began to exert quiet pressure on the Cuban economy. Cuba had been almost wholly dependent on Soviet oil since 1960, when Castro nationalized the refineries owned by international oil companies. Thus, when the Soviets began to slow down deliveries of petroleum to Cuba in early 1968, drastic rationing measures had to be implemented.²⁹

Dominguez suggests that 1968 was a crisis year for the Cubans, when everything and everyone seemed to conspire against them. The long-standing economic boycott by the United States was continuing, their main source of assistance, the Soviet Union, was employing economic sanctions against them, and even China was refusing to sell as much rice and buy as much sugar as had been contracted for.³⁰ In addition, their revolutionary policy in Latin America was collapsing in defeat, as mentioned earlier. The combination of these factors helped to push Cuba back toward the Soviets, with the sugar disaster of 1970 finishing the process.

By 1972, Cuba was fairly well reoriented along the path of Soviet-style economic development. In December of that year, Castro visited Moscow, and returned with a comprehensive economic agreement which included postponement of credit payments until 1985, additional development credits, and fixed pricing plans for sugar and nickel. Castro, in a speech explaining the accords, spoke convincingly of their value, although they would almost certainly mean greater dependence for the Cuban economy:

The Soviet Union worked out most of the ideas and took the initiative. Therefore, these decisions are adopted mainly at the initiative of the Soviet Union. . . . This is a concrete, clear answer to the very serious problems that afflict the world and constitute a truly ideal, exemplary type of economic relations between an industrialized country and a poor, underdeveloped country such as ours.³¹

These are humble-sounding words from a man who eight years before had staked his personal prestige on a bid to move Cuba away from the Soviet economic sphere. However, it should be noted that the health of the Cuban economy continues to depend a great deal on world sugar prices. For example, in boom years like 1973-74, when sugar reached the record price of 66 cents a pound, Cuba was able to diversify trade by exporting to Western Europe, Canada, and Japan. Large sales meant increased creditworthiness, thus Cuba could expand economic ties outside the socialist bloc by borrowing in the West.³²

In addition, it seems that Castro has been able to temper economic dependence by putting the Soviets in his debt in other areas, of which foreign policy has been the most conspicuous in recent times.

Edward Gonzalez has argued convincingly that there are three distinct tendencies in Cuban foreign policy--pragmatic, revolutionary, and "military mission."³³ Each of these is attached to a different elite constituency in the Cuban system, and the constituencies compete for ascendancy in the policy process. The pragmatists are drawn from the ranks of a new class of Cuban managers and technocrats, as well as from among the "old Communists," people whose political affiliation has not been based solely on loyalty to Fidel Castro or his brother Raúl. The

"fidelistas," on the other hand, are veterans who fought with Fidel during the guerrilla campaign of the 1950s. They are supporters of revolution. Finally, the "raulistas" are members of the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces, or work in the Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces under the command of Raúl Castro. They are professional military men whose interests lie in the further development and perfection of the Cuban armed forces. Therefore, they make up the membership of the military mission constituency.

Economic development is the main goal for the pragmatists. They have pushed for both expanded ties with the USSR, to bring the economy back from disaster, and diversification of trading partners in the West, to lessen Cuba's dependence on the Soviet bloc. The revolutionaries have retained their original zeal with regard to antiimperialism and what Gonzalez calls concern with disparities in world power relationships.³⁴ They remain interested in promoting revolution in the Third World. Those adhering to the military mission tendency are concerned about maintaining the high level of professionalization that the army has acquired in the 1970s. Since opportunities for military action on Cuba itself are scarce, Fidel Castro has announced that the Revolutionary Armed Forces are available to aid "sister peoples" in their struggles against imperialism. This in effect expands the mission of the regular Cuban army.

Gonzalez notes that the armed forces have performed well in the mid-1970s, while the economy has not. For that reason, the revolutionary and military mission constituencies have tended to win out over the

pragmatists, who would prefer expanded cooperation with the United States to expanded Cuban intervention in Africa.

Of course, it should be noted that there can be difficulties with this type of analysis. Elite membership in foreign systems is often defined by outsiders strictly on the basis of a person's position in party, state, or society. Indeed, Gonzalez uses data from the December 1976 National Assembly elections to describe the leadership hierarchy in Cuba.³⁵ However, an elite defined in this way says nothing about the relationship between leader and led. It thus breeds doubt as to the ability of outside analysis to predict behavior, particularly in a crisis situation.

Gonzalez' method is most valuable because it focuses attention on political machinations taking place within the Cuban system, not controlled from outside by the Soviet Union. The tendency toward revolution is described as a long-standing ideal to Fidel and his followers, while economic pragmatism reflects a desire to get Cuba "up on its own feet." The search for a military mission is a need generated by increased professionalization of the Cuban army. External factors may affect the competition taking place among these three forces, but it is doubtful that any one factor could completely control the process.

II. Areas of Potential Soviet-Cuban Conflict

Cuba reached an accommodation with the Soviets over ideology in 1968, after five years of defiance and a flirtation with the Chinese. The result of rapprochement was increased Cuban support for Soviet actions, the most conspicuous of which was the Czech invasion of August 1968. However, as noted in the preceding section, Castro and Cuba have retained a high level of revolutionary idealism, which sets them apart from the perhaps more mundane goals of superpower influencebuilding. The USSR, on the other hand, has few such illusions left, particularly considering its difficulties with the ideologically unsophisticated in the Third World. In addition, bolstering the Cuban economy has been an expensive, sometimes thankless job. For those reasons, the Soviet Union is perhaps more interested in undercutting U.S. influence among the developing countries than in imposing its own ideology, which would necessitate increased financial outlays for economic aid.³⁶

What difficulties could this more cynical outlook cause the Cubans? William Dutsch has suggested that the complexity of its involvement in the Horn of Africa may entangle Cuba in an untenable political position:

The Ethiopian mission may prove to be the one with the greatest attendant political costs for Cuba because the politics of the Horn of Africa challenge one of the basic premises of Cuban foreign policy: that international socialist solidarity takes precedence over narrow national interests. In the Horn of Africa it does not.³⁷

The Cubans may have to abandon their "policy of principle" for a less idealistic approach that would allow them to adjust more easily to the flexible, opportunistic actions of their Soviet partners.³⁸

An example of one such action occurred when the Soviets reportedly tried to strike a deal with the Marxist-Leninist wing of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF). If the leftists would agree to maintain links with the "Marxist Republic of Ethiopia," Moscow would support them against the other wings of the Eritrean secessionist movement. Thus the Soviets could extend their influence along the Red Sea while preventing a full-scale secession.³⁹

Moscow's offer was not accepted, however, and ultimately the Soviets supported the Addis Ababa government against the Eritreans, with Cuban help. This type of bizarre bargaining is perhaps not unusual in the context of superpower activities, but for the Cubans, accustomed to throwing themselves behind a single cause, it might have been more difficult to justify.

Cuba has a long tradition of violent revolutionary activity, beginning with its own guerrilla war prior to the 1959 Revolution, continuing with Ché Guevara's campaigns in Latin America in the mid-1960s, and culminating with Castro's inflammatory speeches at the TriContinent Congress in 1966. Following closer alliance with the Soviet Union, Cuba's interest in violent action seems to have continued. For example, in 1975 the French police discovered some communications between Cuban diplomats and the notorious international terrorist known as Carlos, a discovery which contributed to sharp deterioration in Cuban-French relations.⁴⁰

The official Soviet policy toward terrorism appears to be just the opposite. A graphic example of this occurred in Kabul, Afghanistan, in

February 1979, when Soviet-trained Afghani police attacked a hotel room where U.S. Ambassador Adolph Dubs was being held hostage. Read one newspaper account of the incident, "Soviet security officials attached to their embassy and Soviet advisors attached to the Afghan police took charge of the planning and carrying out of a decision not to negotiate further and to attack the unidentified abductors who were holding Mr. Dubs in the Kabul hotel. . . . The Russians in the past have opposed negotiations with terrorists, and American officials said this policy was evidently put into effect."⁴¹ Dubs was killed in the crossfire, which resulted in an angry U.S. protest to Moscow.

If Cuba became openly involved in international terrorist activities in the Third World, the Soviets would probably have to detach themselves officially from at least those aspects of Cuban behavior. Depending on the seriousness of the incident and the volume of world outcry, the Soviets might not care to be freely associated with Cuban revolutionary conduct, particularly if the Cubans became entangled with massacres and other violent actions while carrying out military operations in Africa.

The nonaligned movement has been important to Cuban foreign policy since the early 1960s, when Cuba used the movement to counter pressure from the United States.⁴² Nonalignment suited many of the goals of Cuban policy, including the right to self-determination, noninterference in internal affairs, and equality of states. The movement's emphasis from the beginning has been on making a place for small countries in the international policy process.⁴³

Tito, who originated many of the ideas for the nonaligned movement, did so also to counter superpower pressure--but from the Soviet Union, not the United States. The Yugoslavs had throughout the 1950s made use of the United Nations as protective cover against the Soviets.⁴⁴ When the concept of nonalignment was taking shape in the early 1960s, Tito was able to develop a Third World forum for concerted action completely outside of the East-West blocs. As Rubinstein puts it, "Tito introduced an activism crucial to the transmutation of an idea into a political force."⁴⁵

For the Cubans, this was a perfect group to join. Besieged by the United States on the one hand and uncertain of Khrushchev on the other, they needed a group of allies more like them in goals and temperament. After 1968, however, Cuba drew nearer to the Soviet bloc while continuing to be active in the nonaligned movement. The result was a strange mixture of loyalties: "Cuba tried hard to bring the nonaligned movement closer to the Soviet Union, justifying this position on the grounds that the principles on which nonaligned countries based their policies were much closer to the Soviet Union than to the western countries."⁴⁶

Evidently, Castro did not learn the difficult lesson of Yugoslavia, that is, that the United States and USSR are alike in their great-power aspirations and treatment of smaller countries. Thus began the conflict that has threatened to permanently change the nature of nonalignment.

A nonaligned conference in Belgrade in July 1978 saw two factions, divided roughly along East-West lines, arguing over Cuban military involvement in Africa. The issue was whether or not the 1979 summit

meeting should take place in Havana; certain members wanted to boycott the meeting, others to postpone it or choose another site.⁴⁷ Cuba was strongly criticized by a number of countries, defended by others.

Much of the rhetoric was sharp and divisive:

The bell of danger has rung in Africa and the Middle East. We must be extremely sincere, frank and vigilant. We must warn the superpowers against the use of a state or states belonging to the nonaligned group to intervene in the internal affairs of the Third World countries belonging to this group. This intervention would create divisions serving the strategies of the superpowers, which aim at exploiting our peoples and their resources. . . .⁴⁸

The Cuban foreign minister, Isodoro Malmierca, was quite firm in replies to criticism. In regard to Cuban policy in Africa, he said that Cubans "have returned to the African Continent from where their predecessors were taken away as slaves several centuries ago." They had no imperialist designs on the continent, but were helping to liberate the African peoples. It is ridiculous, said Malmierca, to identify "Cuba's internationalist fighters with mercenaries and interventionists of the old colonial powers." He returned the criticism of Egyptian Minister Butrus Ghali, saying that those "who go to occupied Jerusalem do not wish to go to Havana."⁴⁹

In the end, the conference did decide to go to Havana for the 1979 summit meeting. The conflict was suppressed for the time being, but probably could easily resurface with any sign of renewed Cuban military cooperation with the USSR in Africa. As William Dutsch has commented, Cuba in the 1970s can be considered outside the vanguard of progressive states, because its close association with the USSR comes at a time when

Third World nationalism demands independence from both superpowers.⁵⁰ If criticism from the nonaligned movement continues or increases in volume, Cuba may risk becoming once again the "pariah" of the Third World, a role it lost in Latin America not so long ago.⁵¹ Since Castro has been trying to expand his ties with the developing world, not contract them, it is possible such censure would cause him to tone down military cooperation with the Soviets.⁵²

The same year--1972--that Castro returned home from Moscow with a comprehensive economic agreement, Cuba was invited to join COMECON, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. Stalin's answer to the Marshall Plan, COMECON was formed in January 1949 in order to "harmonize economic development, as well as the exchange of economic and technological information" among the European socialist countries.⁵³ As the concept evolved, the Soviets hoped that COMECON could operate as a unit, safely removed from crises in the world economy and without serious differences to undermine member cooperation.⁵⁴ Given that hope as a reality, Cuba joined the Council at an especially auspicious time, for 1972 was prelude to severe economic problems in the capitalist West.

The cause was the Arab oil embargo of 1973, followed by sharp increases in the price of crude petroleum exported by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Heavy balance-of-payments deficits began to pile up in the United States, Japan, and Western Europe, for large amounts of money were flowing out of those countries to pay the inflated oil bills.

COMECON, however, was supposed to be largely immune to such fluctuations. For more than a year following the embargo, the Soviets did not, indeed, follow the lead of OPEC; the price of oil sold to their socialist brother countries remained fairly intact. In September 1974, Castro could boast that Cuba "with the generous help of the Soviet Union, has not known the energy crisis."⁵⁵ Unfortunately, that situation soon changed.

The COMECON member countries met in Bucharest in January 1975 to discuss adjustments to the prices charged for raw materials traded within the bloc. Reportedly at Soviet initiative, price increases were set for several commodities, the most important of which was oil. Following a simple increase in 1975, during the 1976-1980 period prices were to be calculated annually on the basis of the average world market price for the preceding five years.⁵⁶ The result, obviously, was a larger burden for the oil-importing members of COMECON, who suddenly noticed that they were not in fact insulated from fluctuations in the world market for oil. It is particularly interesting to note the treatment Cuba received at this time.

Prior to the Bucharest meeting, Cuba had consistently been regarded as one of the "poor cousins" of COMECON, along with Mongolia, North Korea, and North Vietnam. This subgroup of the Council was generally considered underdeveloped, and had mostly been on the receiving end of economic and technical aid from industrialized Eastern Europe. When the price increases for oil came in 1975, three of the four countries continued to receive preferential treatment. In fact,

North Korea and North Vietnam experienced price decreases, while prices for Mongolia remained basically the same.⁵⁷

Not so, however, for Cuba: "It is significant that the Soviet Union apparently treated Cuba as one of the East European partners in the matter of increasing petroleum prices, while subsidizing more heavily exports to Mongolia, North Korea, and North Vietnam."⁵⁸ Perhaps the Soviets considered Cuba better able to stand the strain. In any case, since that time the Cuban economy has remained heavily dependent on Soviet oil, no matter what the cost.

Aside from the matter of price, there is also the matter of supply. Although long-established fields in the European section of the country are petering out, the Soviets have experienced difficulties in developing new oilfields in the rough terrain of Siberia. Thus, they are faced with the dilemma of decelerating growth in production at a time of rising demand from their customers.⁵⁹ For the non-oil producing members of COMECON, this means finding alternative sources of oil elsewhere.⁶⁰ For the Cubans, it could mean increased self-sufficiency in extending ties outside the COMECON group. They may, however, be forced to curtail some of their "internationalist" activities in order to gain trade concessions from the West.⁶¹ It can be assumed the Soviets would have little to say about this process, particularly if their problems with the Siberian fields continue.

Unlike the sanction situation imposed on Cuba in 1968, future oil shortages may be beyond the power of the Soviet Union to mend, no matter what the behavior of its Cuban ally.

Once the SALT II agreement began to near conclusion in the winter of 1978, the Soviets reportedly began "restraining themselves" in the Third World in order to reduce tension and improve relations with the United States.⁶² As one commentator put it, the Soviets could have agitated "fiercely" against a separate peace for Egypt and Israel, influencing the other Arab states to take a much harder line against Sadat. Instead, they limited themselves mostly to media expressions of their disapproval, the usual newspaper and journal articles. For the Soviets, it seemed important that the atmosphere surrounding the conclusion of SALT II be as serene as possible. An independent Third World initiative by Cuba at such a time would not be welcome, since almost any action that received worldwide publicity could interfere with Soviet activities elsewhere. It has been suggested, in fact, that the Soviets would simply not allow the Cubans to operate if other strategic interests, such as SALT, were jeopardized.⁶³

How the Cubans would react to such control is an interesting question. According to Gonzalez, "The Cubans seem to have been promoting their own Third World interests--interests which, to be sure, coincided with, and were supportive of, Soviet political and strategic objectives in Southern Africa." He goes on to remark that Cuba became deeply embroiled in Angola at least partly because the intervention of crack South African troops was a "threat to the vital interests of its politically powerful armed forces."⁶⁴ To an army whose main mission is aiding national liberation movements, failure in a campaign could be extremely damaging. Whatever Soviet wishes may be, it is not difficult to imagine the Cubans responding in force to a challenge from South Africa or an extreme upsurge of guerrilla activity in Angola.

Conclusions

Cuba and the Soviet Union embarked twenty years ago on a partnership that has been as varied in temper as the difference in climate between Havana and Moscow. The Cubans began as young revolutionaries, idealistic but unschooled in practical matters of government. They embraced Marxism-Leninism and declared themselves socialist, but with few of the attributes of a true socialist state. Their "real" ideology, however, which was based on egalitarianism and revolutionary zeal, continued to motivate many of their actions, no matter what the response of their Soviet patron.

Early in the relationship, the Cubans were initiated into the nature of superpower competition. The missile crisis of 1962 brought home to them the realization that the Soviet Union would always act in its own best interest--without necessarily consulting Cuba. Thereafter, the Cubans acted as independently as possible both at home, on the economic front, and around the world, as revolutionaries. However, their dependence on the Soviet Union for oil, linked with a failing economy, forced them into closer alliance with the Soviet bloc in the early 1970s.

The Soviets, on the other hand, saw in Cuba an opportunity to loosen the hold of the United States on Latin America. More interested in advancing their own influence than in spreading revolution, the Soviets were somewhat dismayed at the expenditure of resources needed to keep the socialist state of Cuba afloat. Sometimes the Cubans proved to be almost too intractable, with their leanings toward Maoism and violent revolution. However, economic sanctions applied at the right time were very effective in bringing them under control.

The preceding description, of course, much simplifies the relationship between the USSR and Cuba. To a large extent, it is impossible to know the precise nature of their cooperation; the hints that come to the West are tantalizing, but not definitive. However, it is possible to note that the Cubans have acted independently of the Soviet Union on many occasions. They have extended economic ties outside the socialist market group whenever there was opportunity to do so. Their relations with other Third World countries, at least until the early 1970s, were based more on the principles of nonalignment than on Soviet bloc politics. Because of the success of the Cuban Revolution, they have always been disposed to assist national liberation movements, particularly those defined as Marxist. Therefore, the Cubans' relationship with their Soviet allies is not easy to describe. The bonds between the Soviets and Cubans are elastic, and can stretch or break in different places, as they have in the past.

Cuba, in a way, has a strong hold on the Soviet Union. The more the Soviets come to respect Cuban military accomplishments in Africa, the greater will be Cuba's leverage in the partnership.⁶⁵ This leverage is particularly great since the Soviets have thus far been unwilling to commit their own combat troops to the region, and depend on the Cubans to serve that function.

Perhaps it could be said that the Cubans exert influence only where the Soviets fail to do so. This state of affairs might be caused by Soviet inability to exploit a situation, or unwillingness to provoke the United States, or failure to recognize an opening. Whatever the

reason, the Cubans can be expected to judge by their own interests whether taking action will be to their advantage. As a small nation in the circle of a great power, Cuba must do what is expedient for survival. However, thanks to a strong political identity and independent tradition, Cuba can function in partnership with the Soviets, not as their appendage.

Notes

¹ See Edward Gonzalez, "Complexities of Cuban Foreign Policy," Problems of Communism, November-December 1977, p. 2.

² Jorge I. Dominguez, "Cuban Foreign Policy," Foreign Affairs, Fall 1978, pp. 91-95, 98. See also Gonzalez, p. 3; Abraham F. Lowenthal, "Cuba's African Adventure," International Security, Summer 1977, p. 5; William J. Durch, "The Cuban Military in Africa and the Middle East: From Algeria to Angola," Center for Naval Analyses, Professional Paper No. 201, September 1977, p. 4.

³ For detailed commentary on the visits, see Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Daily Reports (hereafter cited as FBIS) for Eastern Europe, August 21 and 22, 1978. For the Soviet reaction, see FBIS for the Soviet Union, August 31, September 1 and 5, 1978.

⁴ Alvin Z. Rubinstein, "Yugoslavia and the Non-aligned World," Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1970, p. 49.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 95-96.

⁶ Jorge F. Pérez-López, "Sugar and Petroleum in Cuban-Soviet Terms of Trade," in Cuba in the World, Cole Blasier and Carmelo Mesa-Lago, eds., University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, PA, 1979, pp. 276-277.

⁷ I am indebted for this analysis to Jeffrey Barrett, a Latin American scholar who has made several trips to Cuba under the sponsorship of the Johns Hopkins School for Advanced International Studies.

⁸ Dominguez, p. 84.

⁹ Wayne S. Smith, "Soviet Policy and Ideological Formulations for Latin America," Orbis, Winter 1972, pp. 1128, 1134.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 1127-28. See also Morton Schwartz, "The USSR and Leftist Regimes in Less-Developed Countries," Survey, Spring 1973.

¹¹ Durch, p. 6.

¹² Rubinstein, p. 301.

¹³ Smith, p. 1142.

¹⁴ Granma (Havana), Vol. 1, No. 2, February 20, 1966.

¹⁵ Smith, pp. 1140-1142.

¹⁶ The economic problems will be discussed in greater detail below. Guevara's failure in Bolivia is discussed in ibid., p. 1142; Dominguez, pp. 87, 89.

¹⁷ Dominguez, p. 89.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 90; see also Rozita Levi, "Cuba and the Nonaligned Movement," in Cuba in the World, op. cit., p. 149.

¹⁹ Smith, p. 1143.

²⁰ Michael A. Samuels et al., "Implications of Soviet and Cuban Activities in Africa for U.S. Policy," CSIS Report, Georgetown Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 2, 1979, p. 45.

²¹ Remarks to the author by Jeffrey Barrett.

²² Durch, p. 36a.

²³ Dominguez, p. 86.

²⁴ Quoted to the author by Jeffrey Barrett.

²⁵ Pérez-López, p. 277.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 282; Carmelo Mesa-Lago, "The Economy and International Economic Relations," in Cuba in the World, op. cit., p. 172.

²⁷ Mesa-Lago, p. 173. Mesa-Lago also points out that the two variables are interrelated, since Cuba was the largest world exporter of sugar in the 1960s. A substantial decline in world exportable output would result from a bad Cuban harvest, thus pushing prices upward.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 171; Pérez-López, p. 283.

²⁹ Dominguez, p. 89; see also Durch, p. 10.

³⁰ Dominguez, pp. 89-90.

³¹ Granma (Havana), Year 8, No. 2, January 14, 1973. This issue contains a detailed description of the agreement.

³² Gonzalez, p. 4.

³³ For details beyond this discussion, see Gonzalez, pp. 6-12.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 9.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 7.

³⁶ For detailed coverage of these points, see Smith, pp. 1122-1146; and Schwartz, pp. 209-244.

³⁷ Durch, p. 54. Lowenthal (pp. 9-10) has pointed out that Cuba does not have such clear alliances with other national liberation groups in Africa as it had with the MPLA in Angola.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 55.

³⁹ F. Stephen Larrabee, Somalia and Moscow's Problems on the Horn of Africa, Radio Liberty Research Paper No. RL 158/77, July 5, 1977, p. 11.

⁴⁰ Dominguez, p. 104.

⁴¹ Bernard Gwertzman, "Leaders of U.S. Angry at Soviet Over Crises Role," New York Times, February 16, 1979.

⁴² Dominguez, p. 92.

⁴³ See Levi, pp. 147-148; and Rubinstein, p. 316.

⁴⁴ Rubinstein, p. 37.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 113.

⁴⁶ Levi, p. 149.

⁴⁷ See "Egyptian Minister Chali Speaks," Cairo MENA in Arabic, July 27, 1978, in FBIS for Eastern Europe, July 28, 1978, pp. I10-I12. For Western news commentary on the conference, see David A. Andelman, "Scarcely Nonaligned, Scarcely a Movement, But They Still Count," New York Times, July 30, 1978; Flora Lewis, "Superpower Proxy Wars and the Difficulty of Remaining Nonaligned," ibid., July 31, 1978; David A. Andelman, "Nonaligned Nations End Divisive Talks; Plan Cuba Meeting," ibid., July 31, 1978.

⁴⁸ "YAR Delegate Speaks," San'a' Domestic Service in Arabic, July 26, 1978, in FBIS for Eastern Europe, July 27, 1978, pp. I7-I8.

⁴⁹ "Cuban Foreign Minister's Address," Belgrade TANJUG Domestic Service in Serbo-Croatian, July 28, 1978, in FBIS for Eastern Europe, July 31, 1978, pp. I2-I3.

⁵⁰ Durch, p. 53.

⁵¹ Gonzalez, p. 5.

⁵² Abraham Lowenthal has pointed out that "Most of the gains Cuba might achieve have already been secured by the Angolan triumph, and would not be multiplied by a second or third intervention, even a successful one." Specifically, he feels that further adventures would be bad for Cuban relations in Latin America. See Lowenthal, pp. 9-10.

⁵³ Summary of Discussions, COMECON: Progress and Prospects (Colloquium, 1977), NATO Directorate of Economic Affairs, Brussels, March 16-18, 1977, p. 9. (Hereafter cited as COMECON Colloquium.)

⁵⁴ Kurt Weisskopf, "Progress of the COMECON Integration Programme," in COMECON Colloquium, p. 23.

⁵⁵ Pérez-López, p. 284.

⁵⁶ Petr Pribyl, "Trade Successfully--Produce Effectively," Prague Zemedelske Noviny in Czech, translated in FBIS Eastern Europe, March 14, 1977, p. A1.

⁵⁷ Pérez-López, p. 288.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ See Prospects for Soviet Oil Production, April 1977; and Prospects for Soviet Oil Production: A Supplemental Analysis, July 1977, Directorate of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency.

⁶⁰ See David A. Andelman, "Hungary Looks Beyond Soviet For Its Oil," New York Times, May 15, 1978; and Michael Dobbs, "Prague 10 Years Later," Washington Post, June 4, 1978.

⁶¹ Gonzalez, p. 13.

⁶² These comments originate with off-the-record remarks by both Soviet and American analysts.

⁶³ Samuels, p. 50.

⁶⁴ Gonzalez, pp. 10-11 (emphasis added).

⁶⁵ Dominguez, p. 97.

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